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## UNDERSTANDING WHICH DISASTERS COULD HAPPEN IN YOUR COMMUNITY



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**Ft. Walton Beach, Fla.** — For America's PrepareAthon!, the Florida Department of Health in Okaloosa County (DOH-Okaloosa) wants to highlight possible disasters that could happen in our communities. America's PrepareAthon! is a grassroots campaign for action to increase community preparedness and resilience. It is important to know that disasters can occur at any time and preparing in advance is the best way to lessen the effect they have on families, businesses, communities, and infrastructure.

**Flooding** is the most common natural disaster in the United States and can happen anywhere. It is particularly important to be prepared for flooding if you live in a low-lying area near a body of water, such as near a river, stream, or culvert; along a coast; or downstream from a dam or levee. Flooding can occur during every season, but some areas of the country are at greater risk at certain times of the year. Coastal areas are at greater risk for flooding during hurricane season. <http://community.fema.gov/hazard/flood/be-smart>

**Hurricanes** have the power to cause widespread devastation, and can affect both coastal and inland areas. Threats from hurricanes include high winds, heavy rainfall, storm surge, coastal and inland flooding, rip currents, and tornadoes. The Atlantic hurricane season runs from June 1 to November 30, with the peak occurring between mid-August and late October. <http://community.fema.gov/hazard/hurricane/be-smart>

**Tornadoes** are one of nature's most violent storms, and can cause death, injury, and destruction within seconds. About 1,200 tornadoes hit the United States every year and every state is at risk. Tornadoes can strike in any season, but occur most often in the spring and summer months. They can occur at all hours of the day and night, but are most likely to occur between 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. <http://community.fema.gov/hazard/tornado/be-smart>

**Wildfires** can occur anywhere and can destroy homes, businesses, infrastructure, natural resources, and agriculture. Wildfires can occur anywhere in the country, from remote wilderness areas in national parks to even in your backyard. Wildfires can start from natural causes, such as lightning, but most are caused by humans, either accidentally or intentionally. Wildfires can occur at any time throughout the year, but the potential is always higher during periods with little or no rainfall, which make brush, grass, and trees dry and burn more easily. High winds can also contribute to spreading the fire. <http://community.fema.gov/hazard/wildfire/be-smart>

**Winter storms** can occur anywhere and bring freezing rain, ice, snow, high winds or a combination of all these conditions. They can cause power outages making it hard to keep warm and making travel very dangerous. Winter storms and colder than normal temperatures

can happen in every region of the country. <http://community.fema.gov/hazard/winter-storm/be-smart>

Power outages can occur with multiple type of emergencies. You should plan ahead and have flashlights in a designated location and practice food safety. It is important to know when it's safe to eat and when it's time to toss it out. When the power is out, refrigerators will keep foods cool for approximately 4 hours. Thawed and refrigerated foods should be thrown out after 4 hours.

DOH-Okaloosa is observing September as National Preparedness Month in order to remind residents on easy ways to keep their families safe during emergencies. DOH-Okaloosa will be releasing weekly messaging to media outlets and community partners to help spread the word on how families can better prepare for the possible emergencies and disasters in Okaloosa County.

The overall theme of the month is **Preparedness Ready means a healthy plan for yourself, the family, kids and pets too! It's that simple!**

The following is the schedule of press releases and topics:

- Week 1—Personal Preparedness
- Week 2—Education and Training
- Week 3—Emergency Preparedness Kits
- Week 4—Prepar-a-thon/Know Your Local Risks
- Week 5—Are you prepared?

For previous DOH-Okaloosa National Preparedness Month press releases, please visit <http://okaloosa.floridahealth.gov/newsroom/index.html>

#### **About the Florida Department of Health**

The department works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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